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Trends in Extension Work in Home Economics

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Washington, D. C.

Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics

Extension Service Circular 133 September, 1930

TRENDS IN EXTENSION WORK IN HOME ECONOMICS

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One of the distinct trends in home economics extension during the past two years has been toward strengthening the financing and personnel of the work. The passage of the Capper-Ketcham Act in 1928 made immediately available to each State an additional $20,000 of Federal funds which was further supplemented the following year with a lump sum of $500,000. Although only the latter amount required offsetting by the States, the increase in State and local appropriations during the past two years has been approximately $1,500,000. The total of home economics extension workers now is 1,685 as compared to 1,368 on June 30, 1928, an increase of 317. Of these 1,345 are county home demonstration workers, compared with 1,049 on June 30, 1928. With the prospect for additional Federal funds for next year, it is expected that this growth in personnel will continue. The influence of home economics extension has been materially broadened and strengthened through the expansion in numbers and the improved training of local leaders, the building of county extension programs on more definite economics information, the perfection of teaching methods, and the strengthening of all local organizations supporting extension work.

Of the various subject-matter phases of home economics extension nutrition and foods continue to enjoy the widest popularity, although there has been a substantial increase in the number of farm women availing themselves of home demonstration service in clothing, home management, home furnishing, health, landscape improvement, and marketing. Child care and training, which is one of the newer phases of home economics extension, has been given marked impetus. The development of recreation, music appreciation, and social activities has been evident.

DISTRIBUTION: A copy of this circular has been sent to each extension director, State and assistant State county agent leader, State and assistant State home demonstration leader, State agricultural college library, and State experiment station library.

Local Leadership

Home demonstration agents reported nearly 66,000 volunteer local leaders working with adult groups in home economics extension during the past year, and nearly 23,000 working with 4-H club members. The local leaders are usually selected by the local groups of which they are members. Their assistance in forwarding home demonstration work is given without pay. They attend training schools to receive instruction, which they pass on to the other women or girls of their respective communities. Part of their work is to acquaint people generally with home economics extension and the various services which it offers. They write news stories and bring public attention to extension activities in other ways. They also help in checking up on the results of the work in their respective communities and lend their efforts to multiply the influence of the paid extension workers.

The plan usually followed in training local project leaders has been to hold a one or 2-day training school at some central point. Leaders from the various clubs attend and are given instruction by the county home demonstration agent, a home economics specialist, or the State home demonstration leader. Later they instruct their own group as they have been taught, coming back periodically for further training as the project progresses. The home demonstration leader of Michigan describes their plan for leader training, which is typical, as follows;

"The project leaders spend one day at the training class each month while the project is being carried and, theoretically, one day in teaching the lesson. As a matter of fact there are few leaders who do not spend more than one day in giving the work to the groups, as members are always wanting extra help. The two leaders from each group, particularly in counties where work on teaching methods has been given, are setting aside definite time when they get together to prepare the lesson. Two days and a half a month per leader would probably be a fair estimate of the amount of time spent on extension work. For most of these leaders it also means an expenditure of money for transportation to the training center and lunch, either carried or bought. Many of the leaders come as far as 25 miles to the training centers. In some of the counties the expenses of the leaders are paid from the group treasury, the members contributing for this purpose. Despite the necessary expenditure of time, effort, and money the leaders feel it an honor to be chosen by their group members and that they receive more than they give."

Through years of experience in training local leaders, home demonstration workers have established certain principles which make for successful quality of results obtained. Experience in many States has shown that leadership is more effective when leaders are elected by the agent or when chosen by a committee. Clubs which have been functioning some time have learned the qualifications of a good leader and are making better selections. Duties are explained to the leaders and they undertake the job with a realization of what is expected. Experience has

shown home demonstration workers that it is necessary to give leaders training in teaching methods as well as subject matter information.

Recognition is being given to the fact that all too often home demonstration contacts are limited to those enrolled in clubs and that only a small proportion of the rural women are reached by the agent. With a better quality of instruction by local leaders, attention is now being directed toward a greater spread of influence through local leadership. The State leader in California reports the results of an effort along this line as follows:

"Since the main problem in each county is to influence the largest possible number of farm homes, the project neighborhood-leader plan was tried with outstanding success. The project leaders from different communities attended a training school, where they were instructed by the home demonstration agent. Each project leader within seven days met with and trained 4 neighborhood leaders, each of whom gave the demonstration before 3 other farm women. These 3 in turn met with 2 others and each of the 2 with 1. In each step of the plan effort was made to reach some women who had not been in regular attendance in the home demonstration or farm-center groups. Sixteen counties used this plan at least once during the year in 141 centers, reaching 6,676 farm homes."

Many local leaders took the responsibility of arranging for attractive and instructive window displays in local stores where products concerned with extension projects are handled. Visitors' days at project meetings have been the means of bringing more women in contact with extension work. In a Kansas county, for instance, the nutrition project leaders planned for a series of such days. The slogan was, "Every member bring at least one guest on Guest Day." The meeting was usually held in a home where a demonstration kitchen or living room had been established and part of the program consisted of showing improvements in this room to the guests. The various project leaders gave short, interesting talks outlining the work accomplished in their project and a forecast of work planned for the coming year. Roll call was usually answered by "How extension work has helped me." These guest days resulted in a substantial increase in membership of home demonstration clubs.

Program of Work

Well-organized efforts to determine more fundamental programs of work are under way in many States. Local development of programs, based on fundamental needs of the community rather than a course of study or a series of lessons, has been encouraged by the supervisors and specialists in some States. On their visits to the counties these workers make a business of analyzing programs and helping to develop them. There is a growing tendency to build long-time programs, setting them up for a two to five-year period.

While it has always been the aim to have the extension program based on local needs, more thought and attention of home demonstration people is now being given to finding the needs of the majority of farm women in a community than ever before. Studies and surveys are being used more and more, and their results serve as a guide in planning the extension program. These surveys include not only conditions in the home but data from doctors, dentists, grocers, druggists, and others that would indicate what the real problems are.

Among the important questions included in these surveys are;

How much money does the farm family have to spend for family living?

What sort of living standard do farm people want for themselves?

What will it cost?

Extension workers are guiding farm people in setting up desirable standards of living. In many counties this work has been centered around the farm and home economics conference which started in some of the Western States and which is serving as a means for determining an extension program. The following plan used in Franklin County, Vt., as a method for determining a long-time county extension program is typical of this new development which is being used with variations in many States;

"A farm and home economics conference was held in December, 1929. This was the result of preparation for many months, during which time surveys were made to determine farm-home conditions, size and type of farm, and income from farming. In the surveys which concerned the farm home, local leaders were trained to secure the information. Four training schools were held for leaders along the following lines;- Food, clothing, home furnishings, and farm-home conditions, including the budget. At the conference, 150 farm men and women came together for two days to discuss the findings revealed by these surveys. Facts such as these are presented for their consideration;

The average amount of money available for family living in farm homes in this county is $825 a year.

Thirty-six per cent of the farm homes in this county do not have running water.

Fifty-four per cent of the farm homes in this county can less than 100 quarts of vegetables each year.

Fifty-one per cent of the homes in this county provide one quart of milk a day for children.

Fifty per cent of the children have decayed teeth.

Working in committees, guided by extension specialists and agents, these representative farmers and home makers set up living standards for farm families in their county. They made recommendations for size and type of farming business to produce the $1,500 net income which farm women named as the cost for a minimum standard. Out of these recommendations will evolve a long-time farm and home program in Franklin County."

Faced by findings such as those described above, home demonstration agents, specialists, and supervisors, as well as local advisory councils responsible for formulating the extension program, realize that their immediate concern is "What shall be done to solve these problems?" rather than "What projects has the extension service to offer this year?"

Aside from the value of developing a county program by this method, there is an inestimable value in the awakened interest and consequent cooperation of the group of farm people participating in this type of program-making conference.

Organization

While the name and form of the organization vary, the purpose of home demonstration work in all States is the same. The unit of organization in the community continues to be the home demonstration club or group working with the home demonstration agent. These groups are organized primarily to receive instruction, but more and more each year members take an active part in determining the local programs of work. County councils or advisory committees made up of representatives from local clubs work with the home demonstration agent in considering problems and outlining programs. These councils are growing in number and importance. They sponsor extension activities, offer constructive help, and assist definitely in carrying out the county program.

Well-organized county councils or advisory committees are enabling the agents to reach more farm homes. They serve as a means of developing leadership among farm women; the kind of leadership that is farseeing. The farm women who are members of these committees are seeing beyond the needs of their own homes and families to the needs of their community and county. They are coming to see in a larger way their responsibilities and opportunities and are contributing definitely to the development of the home demonstration program.

Teaching Methods

Since most of the home demonstration work centers around community groups, instruction in the form of lectures and demonstrations given at meetings has been the type of teaching most widely used.

More and more each year this method is being supplemented by various other means of teaching. Many farm women to whom extension teaching would be most valuable are unable to leave home to attend group meetings. Each year an increasing effort is made to reach these women by the use of newspaper stories and circular letters. Many other women who

have not become acquainted with extension work have had their enthusiasm aroused through a contest, a tour, or a fashion show. They have been influenced by these means to make changes which have resulted in more convenient homes with attractive surroundings, suitable and becoming clothing at less cost, and improved health due to wiser selection of food.

News stories and articles are being used more and more as a means of teaching. Many people are becoming acquainted with extension work each year by means of their local newspapers. Realizing that the expansion of work depends on the knowledge and support of the people, home demonstration forces are concentrating on a definite publicity program. Two distinct features of this program stressed in 1929 were the publicity contest for extension workers and training local leaders in news writing.

In general, the friendly cooperation of the press toward extension work has been established and each year agents are taking greater advantage of this opportunity to get their work before the public. The information contest for extension agents is now part of the program in a number of States and is serving as an excellent device to sell the value of informational mediums to the home demonstration agent.

News-writing schools for local leaders are proving another effective method of increasing publicity. In many States a series of 1-day schools is held in counties where the extension editor teaches news writing to women who have been elected as publicity chairmen of their project groups. At these schools the women write news articles on assigned topics and receive constructive criticism from their instructor. The local editor is often present and gives the women an idea of the kind of news stories that are acceptable.

Another method of reaching farm women is through home visits. "Home visits with a purpose," is a slogan used in one State with the belief that contacts made in this way are invaluable to home demonstration work. Fashion shows, exhibits of various kinds, tours to see improved kitchens and gardens are the means of introducing many farm women to extension work, providing an opportunity for them to see and learn improved methods of carrying on the multiplicity of activities connected with their occupation as home makers. Instruction given at camps and short courses is a source of help and inspiration to many farm women. In many of these programs some time is devoted to a study of parliamentary law and to the principles and duties of citizenship.

These programs included many features pertaining to the cultural environment of the home such as a study and appreciation of music, books, pictures, birds, and flowers. More attention is being given each year to the cultural side of the rural woman's life, first aiding her to plan her home and her work so as to have leisure time and then assisting her to use that leisure profitably. Farm women's camps have been a feature of the work in many States, and more and more rural women are developing an appreciation of their need for and the benefits to be derived from healthful recreation.

Foods and Nutrition

Selecting food in accordance with a standard for health and growth, preparing it so that it will be appetizing and palatable, and teaching her family the wisdom of a well-balanced diet continued to be major interests of the farm home maker. Considerable progress is reported as a result of extension effort to improve community meals. There is probably no one way of judging changed food habits better than by observing the type of meals served at community gatherings where farm people eat together. Salads of succulent vegetables and fruits are fast becoming the rule rather than the exception. Many covered dishes contain hot buttered or creamed vegetables which formerly contained starchy foods or pie. Milk is served to children at community meals and fewer kinds of desserts are in evidence. Believing that the foundation for food nutrition is based on habits established in early childhood, many States in their nutrition programs are concentrating on work with mothers of young children.

Clothing

How to dress herself and members of her family suitably and becomingly at low cost is a problem which faces many a farm woman. Home demonstration work is helping to solve this problem by showing her how to select materials wisely, how to choose ready-made garments that fit and suit; and if she wishes to sew, how to make dresses, underclothes, and hats for herself and her children. More farm women and girls are learning each year how to care for clothing properly, how to do dry cleaning at home, how to remodel and renovate, thus adding years of life to many garments with a corresponding saving in dollars. That the farm woman is acquiring higher clothing standards and is choosing her clothes with greater discrimination, using her knowledge of line, color, and suitability to wearer, is obvious to anyone who visits a home demonstration group in these days.

Many States in their clothing programs are emphasizing clothing budgets. In the farm and home economics conferences the committee on clothing works out a clothing budget for a farm family of five, setting up a minimum clothing standard for farmers, their wives and children, and estimating the cost. These detailed budgets, worked out by farm women themselves, have been given publicity and are stimulating considerable interest.

Dress contests and fashion shows continue in popularity. It is interesting to note that in the junior work in several States attention is being directed toward the matter of clothing for the farm boy. Oklahoma conducted an appropriate dress contest for 4-H club boys as well as for girls. More than 150 manly, well-dressed boys represented their home counties in this contest, bearing witness to the fact that a project of this kind is of value.

Home Management

The addition of labor-saving equipment to many farm homes is enabling these home makers to spend fewer hours doing housework and allowing more time for other phases of home making. As a Kansas woman said about her made-over kitchen, "I now have more time to spend with my children, my flowers, and my friends." More and more each year farm women are displaying greater interest in making a definite plan for expenditure having to do with family living.

Improvement of Homes and Surroundings

An achievement of outstanding importance in home demonstration work is the large number of farm homes which have been made more beautiful both inside and outside. Thousands of girls have entered the "Own your own room" contest which has been carried on for several years. The changes wrought in this one room have often been the means of making the entire home more livable and more beautiful. Home demonstration agents report that they frequently find an entire family which has a new outlook on life because of results obtained by a 4-H club girl who has undertaken some phase of home-improvement work. Accounts of this work from every State tell much the same story; a carefully thought out plan combined with a willingness to work, a few dollars, much scrubbing, a little paint, and new curtains have resulted in improvements out of all proportion to the outlay of time and money.

In many States the improvement of home grounds has received great impetus from yard-improvement contests. As a result, thousands of lawns have been beautified and flowers, trees, shrubs, and vines planted according to landscape plans furnished by home demonstration agents and horticultural specialists. Native rocks have been used to build walls, flagstone walks, lily ponds, rock gardens; to outline driveways and borders; and to make bases for bird baths and sundials. Bird houses, arbors, and trellises for vines and comfortable garden seats are making the outdoor living room of many farm homes a thing of beauty and a joy forever. The satisfaction resulting to those who dwell in these homes can not be measured, but the stories of accomplishment relate that all of these improvements are adding joy and contentment to living in the country.

Home Health and Sanitation

A safe water supply and sanitary sewage disposal for every farm home is ever the concern of the home demonstration worker. Many farm families installed water supply and sewage disposal systems according to plans furnished by the home demonstration agent and the rural engineering specialist. "Running water in every farm and small-town home" was the slogan of a State-wide contest carried on in Illinois.

Farm women and girls are acquiring new standards of health through extension activities. The use of the food-selection score card has

brought to the attention of many people the relation between food and health. Posture demonstrations have brought out the fact that there is a relationship between posture and health. At many summer camps and short courses a physician is present who gives a complete physical examination to those in attendance who choose to check up on their health in this way. County and State 4-H health contests have been the means of giving an entirely new conception of health to farm boys and girls. They have come to see that good health is an asset in school and on the playground and is a part of their working capital, upon which much of their success in life depends.

Child Care and Training

Eight of the States now employ specialists in the new and important field of child care and training. For the most part this is taking the form of parent education and mothers, and fathers too in some cases, come together in an effort to gain a better understanding of the child mind at different stages of his development and to acquire a greater knowledge of the psychology governing the formation of habits. Parents are showing marked interest in this phase of extension work, indicating a need and desire for help and instruction along these lines.

Gardening and Marketing

An increased interest in gardening is noticeable. The recommendations made at farm and home economics conferences invariably include plans for an extensive garden for every farm home, to insure a variety of vegetables in order to safeguard health, to save money, and in many cases to sell as a means of adding to the income. The well-known injunction which is a part of extention teaching in nutrition, "Use two vegetables a day besides potatoes, including leafy green vegetables and tomatoes several times a week," has been the stimulating force responsible for many home gardens, planned to provide a generous amount of vegetables to be canned and stored for use during the winter months. In the food-preservation work emphasis is placed upon the food budget, that is, planning the canning to provide two vegetables a day with plenty of greens and tomatoes the year round.

In the South winter gardens are receiving much attention, and more than 20,000 persons grew winter gardens for the first time in 1929. In many counties demonstration gardens were established, the farm home maker following plans laid out by the home demonstration agent and gardening specialist. These gardens were visited by large numbers of people throughout the season by means of garden tours organized by extension agents. Garden contests sponsored by local newspapers, women's clubs, and chambers of commerce stimulated this movement to a great degree.

At the State fair in Mississippi in 1929 results of county contests were exhibited in order to show the possibilities of year-round gardens in Mississippi. One county exhibited a collection of 48 kinds of vegetables, while none of the 18 county exhibits showed less than 22 varieties of vegetables. In addition to the vegetables shown, each county exhibited an educational poster describing the uses of vegetables in the diet. As one contestant remarked, "This is a contest in which you win even if you lose!"

Home dairying and home poultry occupy an important place in the home demonstration program of the South. Poultry work was given much attention in 1929 in hundreds of southern counties because of the possibilities of almost immediate financial returns. The home poultry flock represents one of the farm woman's chief sources of extra money necessary to make desired improvements about the home, to buy books and clothes for the family, and to keep the children in school.

As a result of this increased production of improved varieties of fruits and vegetables, better-quality poultry and dairy products, high-grade canned and preserved foods, greater interest has been shown in standardization and marketing of the farm-home surplus. Women and girls, with the guidance of extension workers, have shown great initiative in developing marketable articles with packages and labels that are individual and unusual. The growth of club markets in the Southern States has been steady over a period of years, in volume of sales as well as business management and standards of quality. At these markets farm women sell canned products, poultry, fresh vegetables, flowers, dairy products, breads, cakes, and other cooked foods. Markets of this kind are now operating successfully in other sections of the country due to home demonstration work.

Attractive fireside industries and farm-home enterprises such as basketry and rug making have been developed. Women and girls everywhere are manifesting greater interest in learning to utilize profitably the resources of the farm home. Leaders state that the secret of financial success along this line of home industries is standardization and craftsmanship whether the work be with fruits, vegetables, poultry, eggs, butter, cheese, baskets, rugs, or rush-bottom chair seats.

Much of the increased income derived from these varied enterprises has been devoted to improving and beautifying the home. A Florida home demonstration agent reports that as a result of encouraging farm women to grow more vegetables and poultry for home use and some for sale they now have in that county pantries filled with a variety of canned fruits and vegetables, new bank accounts, new pieces of furniture, more shrubs, roses and other plants, better poultry yards and houses, several homes screened, some new coats, dresses, and hats that would never have been bought except for the few chickens, vegetables, or canned products sold.

Turning the farm-home surplus into farm home conveniences, into needed garments for the family, and into "go-to-college" funds is proving to be a source of pleasure as well as profit to thousands of women and girls.

Summary

Recent years have shown a marked growth in extension personnel and in the number of farm women participating in home demonstration work. These rural women help to plan the work and serve as local leaders, thus enabling the paid workers to reach a larger number of rural people. The use of economic facts and of the needs of the people as a basis for planning programs of work is continually increasing. Fine support for extension work is given by business groups, the press, and by other agencies. There is a growing tendency toward the development of cultural and recreational activities along with the increase in economic work looking toward a larger income for the farm family. Home demonstration work is now on a more satisfactory basis than ever before and is going forward toward greater accomplishments.